

simchahs

Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin says Imago Therapy can bring even separated couples back together.

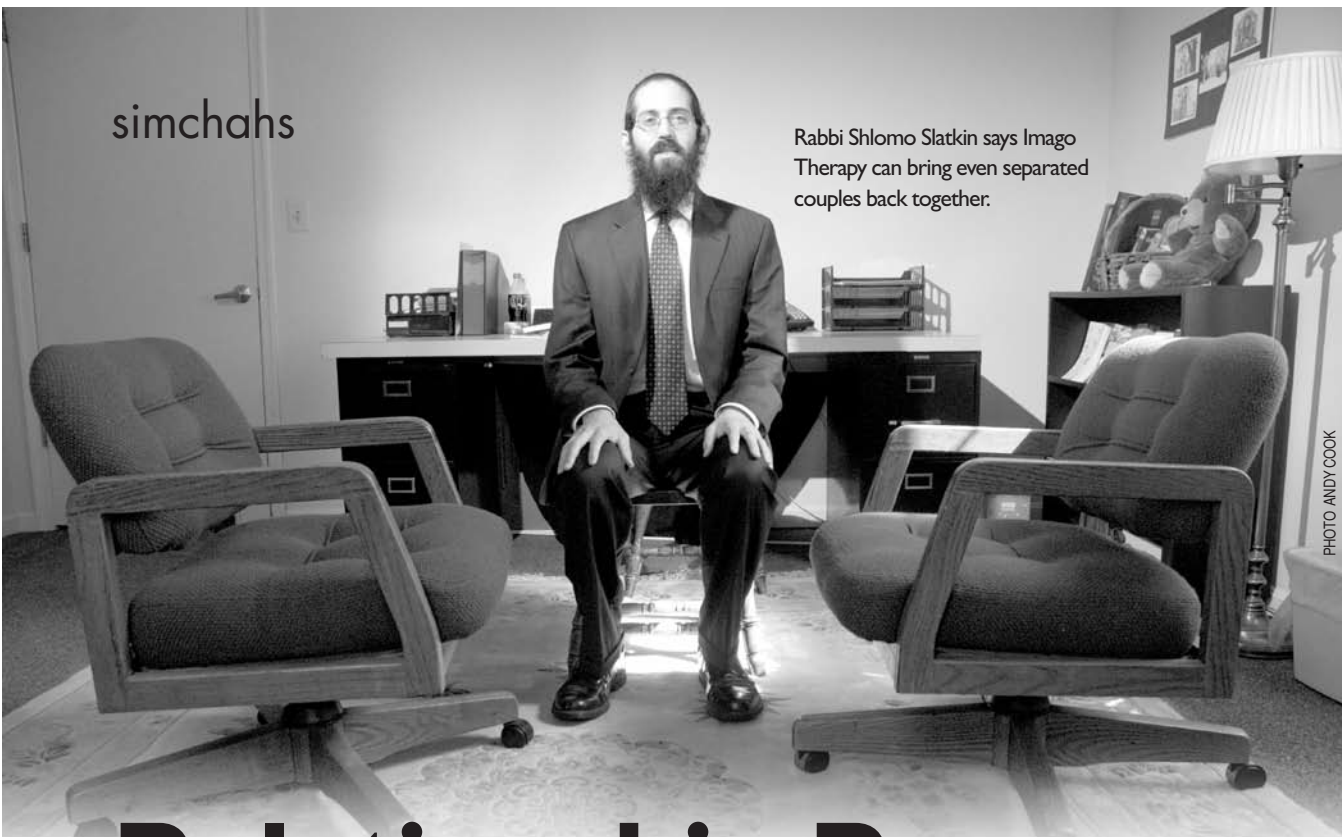


PHOTO: ANDY COOK

# Relationship Rescue

Imago Therapy reconnects couples in faith-based way.

**Maayan Jaffe**  
Staff Reporter

Three steps: mirroring, validating and empathizing. That's all it takes, according to Harville Hendrix, to heal a broken relationship.

It sounds too good to be true, but Dr. Hendrix's "Imago Relationship Therapy" has been healing couples throughout the world. Oprah Winfrey included "Imago Theory" in her list of "Unforgettable! Oprah's Top 20 Shows" in 2005. Dr. Hendrix's book, "Getting the Love You Want," about Imago Relationship Therapy has been on *The New York Times* best seller list 11 times in 20 years. Imago is from the Latin, meaning image.

Now, local Imago therapist Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin has worked with Dr. Hendrix to complete a special Imago Therapy course/workshop for Jewish audiences. Set for November 2008, it's called "Couplehood as a Spiritual Path," and is a faith-centered educational program for committed couples who want to realize their relationship potential.

The program takes two forms: group study or at home with one's partner. Both options are six sessions long and require purchasing two participant manuals and one DVD, which guide couples through written and experiential exercises, daily practice and suggested readings from "Getting the Love You Want."

"It's a wonderful adult ed piece, grounded in our tradition," says Rabbi Slatkin. "Our intimate relationships are one way to become more divinely connected. The relationship between a husband and wife parallels in many ways the relationship between God and man/woman. We can learn what it means to be in a relationship with God through experiencing a real, fulfilling and connected relationship with our spouse."

But it's not frothy and it's not esoteric. "Couplehood as a Spiritual Path" takes an in-depth look at the psychological and spiritual workings of intimate relationships by exploring the origins of attraction and conflict, concurrently helping couples learn new ways to talk and listen, co-create a relationship vision and uncover the opportunities for emotional healing and spiritual growth.

It's not full-fledged therapy — you have to pay for a private session for that — but it's a chance for couples to learn the basics of Imago therapy and to grow in their relationship. Rabbi Slatkin, who works full time for the Pastoral Counseling and Consultation Centers of Greater Washington, will run workshops at local synagogues and community centers.

Cantor Roger Eisenberg is a big supporter of Rabbi Slatkin's work and said he can see how the program will work in the synagogue environment.

He says, "Imago is a program focused on relationships and a synagogue is a microcosm of relationships."

What makes Imago Relationship Therapy so unique is the role of the therapist — which is why it can work so well as a workshop. The therapist is there, explained Rabbi Slatkin, to create a safe environment. He serves more as a guider and facilitator than an adviser, rarely offering his opinion.

"It is not about the issues. It is learning about how to be connected so you can deal with all the issues," says Rabbi Slatkin.

In sessions, couples face each other and begin talking. They learn to put themselves in each other's shoes by listening and repeating back what the other said. It's mirroring.

"I think it's very powerful," says Rabbi Slatkin.

So do the couples who learn how to use it. Take Betty Cherniak. She and her husband have been seeing Rabbi Slatkin for the last several years, after they hit a dead end in traditional marriage counseling. Mrs. Cherniak says she thought the first session was "very unusual, unlike anything I'd ever tried," but by the end, she and her husband were hooked.

"It's not a quick fix, it's pretty labor intensive and takes real discipline to do it," she says of her now once-every-other-month sessions. "But Imago Therapy addresses the issues in a

### Booking Time For Your Relationship

If you aren't ready to register for an Imago Therapy workshop, check out Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin's new book, "The Jewish Marriage Book: Improving Your Marriage One Jewish Holiday at a Time." Rabbi Slatkin's self-published work combines the ancient wisdom of the Torah with the cutting edge in marital therapy.

For more information, go to [thejewishmarriagebook.com](http://thejewishmarriagebook.com).

### Imago Therapy For Peace?

In Israel, folks are using Imago to help bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Founded in 2003, the Israeli-Palestinian Imago Project is a partnership of Al-Quds University and the Israeli Center for Treatment of Psychotrauma. Leaders from both institutions hold workshops and dialogue sessions using the Imago technique as a powerful means of creating communication between the two parties.

For more information, go to [peacemandala.com/IP\\_ImagoProject.pdf](http://peacemandala.com/IP_ImagoProject.pdf).

much more meaningful way than traditional counseling does."

She said there's no question that every couple could benefit from Imago Therapy, but there has to be determination and commitment to work on oneself.

"Imago is an in-depth technique that empowers people. ... It enables each partner to enter the world of the other, fostering kindness and understanding where there may have been ... criticism in the past," says Mrs. Cherniak. "It provides an excellent mechanism available at any time for the couple, completely free of the facilitator, for defusing tension, clearing up misunderstandings and false assumptions, and fostering communication ... encouraging love and compassion."

The DVDs are available for purchase at [couplehoodaspiritualpath.com](http://couplehoodaspiritualpath.com). A list of Rabbi Slatkin's upcoming workshops and his contact information can be found at [jewishmarriagecounseling.com](http://jewishmarriagecounseling.com).

Says Rabbi Slatkin: "Too many people are getting needlessly divorced. With Imago Therapy, I've seen people who are separated come back together and be in the best place ever in their relationship." □



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